

Support available for your cervical screening (smear test)

Shall I go for my smear test ?

This leaflet can help

It's got lots of tips



Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for women who find it hard to go for cervical screening (a smear test).

Some women feel anxious because they have a mental health condition, had a traumatic experience in the past, or for another reason.

If you feel this way, this leaflet talks about what support is available. We hope it helps you to make a decision about cervical screening.

You can use this leaflet to plan your appointment.

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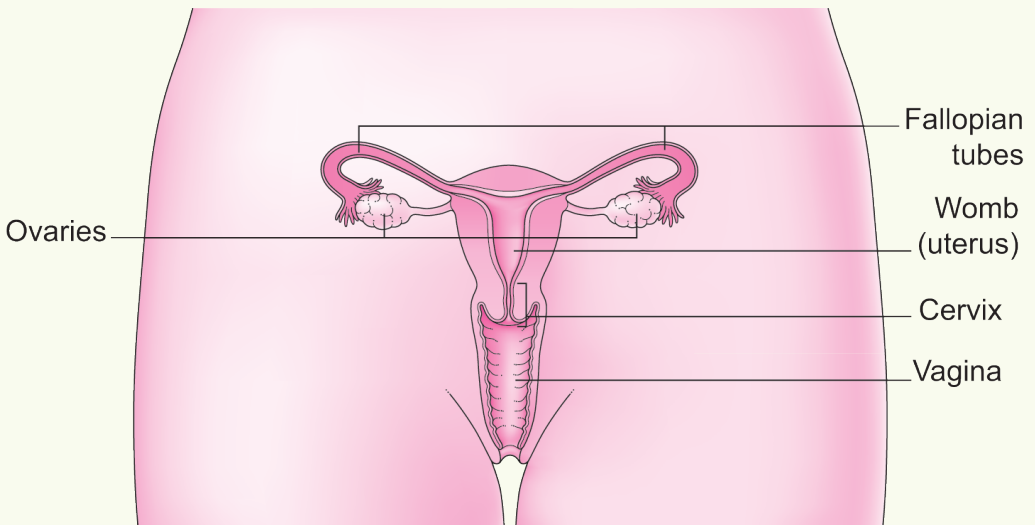
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What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening is a free health check that looks for HPV or for cell changes (abnormal cells) on your cervix.


Your cervix is a part of your body that joins the top of your vagina to your womb.

The female reproductive system



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If not monitored or treated, some cell changes may eventually develop into cervical cancer.



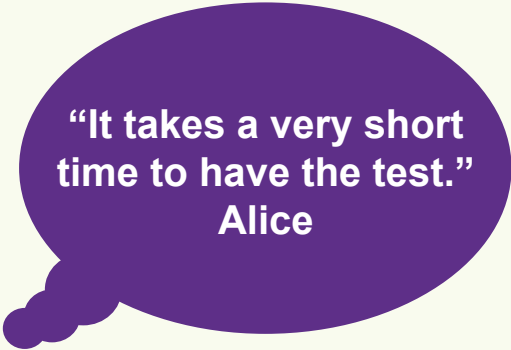
Going for cervical screening when invited is the best way to protect yourself against cervical cancer.

Your GP surgery will invite you for cervical screening if:

- your contact details are up to date
- you are between 25 and 64 years old

In some areas, you may be able to arrange your appointment at a sexual health or well woman clinic instead of your GP surgery.

If you're not sure whether you need a test, talk to your GP or nurse.



**“It takes a very short
time to have the test.”**
Alice


Booking your appointment

- **If you get anxious sitting in waiting rooms, let the receptionist know.** You can ask to book the first appointment of the day, so you aren't waiting long.
- **If you would prefer to be seen by a woman, ask for a female nurse.**
- **If it's helpful, ask for an appointment reminder.** This could be by text, post or telephone.
- **Tell the receptionist if you would like a chaperone.** This is a person, like another nurse, who can be there during the test.
- **You may feel you need more time for your cervical screening.** Ask the receptionist if you can book a longer appointment.

I have decided to book an appointment because:

.....

.....



**"I put everything in my diary
and important things have
alarms on them as well."**

Tracy

Before your appointment

Some women found these tips helpful:

- **Plan travel to your appointment.** Know what time you need to leave and how you will get there.
- **Bring something that is comforting or helps you relax.** For example, a music player, magazine or nicotine chewing gum if you're a smoker.
- **Wear a skirt or dress.** You can keep these on during the test.
- **Make plans after your appointment.** You could treat yourself to something nice and relaxing.
- **If you think the test may be uncomfortable, speak with the nurse beforehand.** They can offer support.
- **Ask someone you trust to go with you.** This could be a friend, relative or your mental health worker, who can also be with you after your appointment.

This would help me go to my appointment:

.....

.....

I want to ask the nurse:

.....

.....

Dear nurse, some things on this page may affect my experience. I may need extra support.

On both pages, tick the boxes that describe your situation:

☐ I have a mental health condition:
.....

☐ I hear voices

☐ My medication makes me shake

☐ I found it hard to leave my house

☐ I sometimes find it hard to process information

☐ I don't like to feel exposed or naked

☐ I am embarrassed by my body

☐ I have scars

☐ I feel judged

☐ I feel like I'm a burden

☐ I am afraid it will hurt

☐ I may start to cry or freeze up


☐ I may pass out or faint

- ☐ I may have a panic attack
- ☐ I get distressed during a physical examination
- ☐ I have had a bad smear test experience
- ☐ I have experienced trauma
- ☐ I am a survivor of sexual violence
- ☐ I am a survivor of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)
- ☐ Please warn me before you touch me
- ☐ I would prefer a soft touch
- ☐ I would prefer a firm touch
- ☐ I want the door locked
- ☐ I want the door unlocked
- ☐ Waiting rooms make my symptoms worse
- ☐ These words can trigger anxiety attacks or flashbacks:
.....
.....
- ☐ Other:

During your appointment

The test only takes a few minutes. It might feel uncomfortable, but should not be painful.

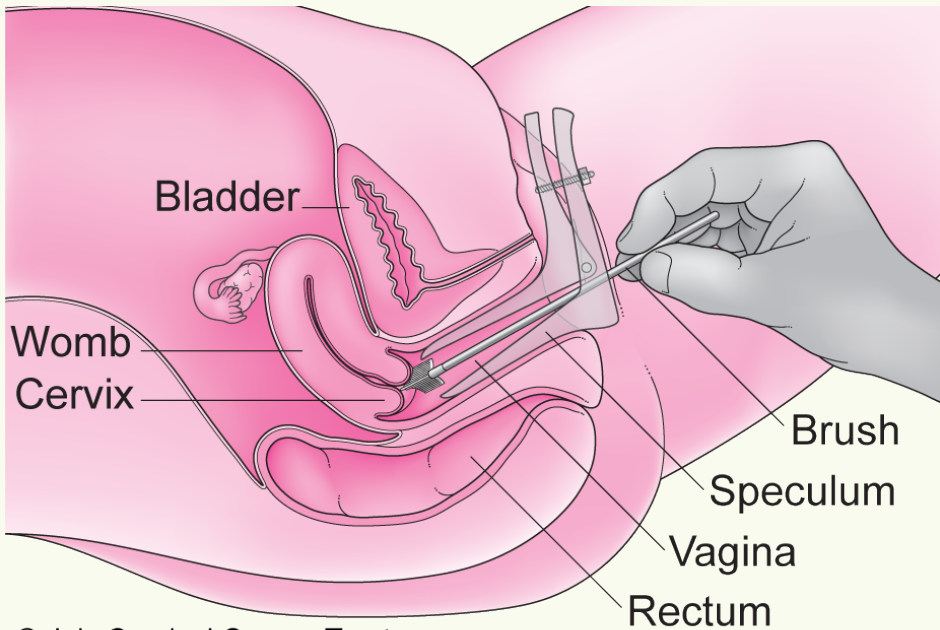
1. The nurse will explain the test at the start of your appointment.
2. Remember, you are in control during the test. It may help to agree a word or hand signal, so the nurse knows to stop immediately if you want them to.
3. You will have a private space to undress from the waist down.
4. The nurse will ask you to lie back on a couch with your knees bent and apart. You will have a clean sheet to cover you.
5. A plastic or metal tool (a speculum) will be gently put into your vagina. It opens so the nurse can see your cervix. If the speculum is uncomfortable, ask for a smaller size.
6. The nurse will use a small, soft brush to take a sample of cells from your cervix.



“Somebody being in the waiting room with me helps.”

Maria

Someone having cervical screening (a smear test)



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7. That's it! The test is over. The sample of cells is sent to a laboratory for testing.
8. Some women find it helpful to have a tissue to wipe themselves after the test. You can ask the nurse for a tissue or bring one yourself.

After your appointment

After your appointment, you will get a letter with your results. This should arrive within 2 weeks, but may take longer.

You may feel anxious while waiting for your results. It may help to speak with someone you trust about how you are feeling.

Most women get a clear result, but some need further tests. This will help the doctors know how to monitor or treat you.

Remember, having an abnormal result does not mean you have cancer.

If you need support, there are different ways to get it:

- Talk to a trusted friend, relative or health professional.
- If you find spiritual support helpful, speak with a religious or spiritual leader.
- You may prefer to speak to someone you don't know. Pages 14 and 15 list helplines you can call.



“I’d just call my auntie for support.”
Prisha

Looking after your health

You will get another invite when you are due for cervical screening again.

It is important to be aware of symptoms, including:

- bleeding that is unusual for you – for example between regular periods or after sex
- bleeding after menopause
- pain or discomfort during sex
- changes to vaginal discharge – for example being thicker than usual or smelling bad
- unexplained pain between your hip bones (pelvis) that lasts a long time.

These symptoms don't mean you have cancer and are often caused by other things, but it's important to get them checked.



If you have symptoms, make an appointment to see your GP. You don't have to wait for a cervical screening invite.

Getting support

Jo's cervical
cancer **trust**



Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust

A national charity dedicated to eliminating cervical cancer. Has information and support about cervical screening,

cell changes (abnormal cells) and cervical cancer – no question is too big or small.

www.jostrust.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 802 8000

(For opening hours, visit www.jostrust.org.uk/helpline)

Ask the Expert: www.jostrust.org.uk/ask-expert

*MY BODY BACK
PROJECT*



My Body Back (London and Glasgow)

Offers support to women to reclaim control of their body after sexual violence. Runs specialist clinics offering cervical screening and STI testing in London and Glasgow for women and trans men who

have experienced sexual violence.

www.mybodybackproject.com

Email: info@mybodybackproject.com

Samaritans

Samaritans is available round the clock, every single day of the year. You can talk to them any time you like, in your own way, about whatever's getting to you.

Call free any time on 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

Find your nearest branch at www.samaritans.org



SANE

National mental health helpline offering specialist emotional support to anyone affected by mental illness.

www.sane.org.uk

SANEline: 0300 304 7000

(Every day, 4.30pm to 10.30pm)

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Download this leaflet and its accompanying video at
www.jostrust.org.uk
or
www.surrey.ac.uk/mental-health-friendly-health-checks

Read more about cervical screening:

- **www.gov.uk/government/collections/cervical-screening-information-leaflets**
- **www.jostrust.org.uk/smeartest**

This leaflet was printed in 2019. Version 1.0.
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